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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. ARMS PROCUREMENT BILL

1. Summary: Major Chinese-language Taiwan dailies (12/22) focused on the Taipei District Court's verdict that President Chen Shui-bian must compensate former KMT Chairman Lien and PFP Chairman James Soong in the "soft coup" case with a payment of NT\$1 each and issue public apologies through advertisements in local newspapers.

The editorials and commentaries (12/22) still focus on the U.S. arms procurement bill. The pro-independence "Liberty Times" said in its editorial that KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou should help pass the U.S. arms procurement bill in the Legislative Yuan, because he might possibly be Taiwan's president in 2008 and that one of the president's responsibility is to protect the safety of the citizens. The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" editorialized that it is time for Chairman Ma to show his sincerity regarding the protection of Taiwan security through rational discussions of the bill. Taiwan Think Tank's analyst Lai I-chung wrote in the pro-independence, limited-circulated "Taiwan Daily" that the United States considers Taiwan 'unreliable' due to the delayed passage of the bill. End summary.

2. "The U.S. Arms Procurement Bill is the First Challenge that [KMT Chairman] Ma Ying-jeou Faces Before Running for the 2008 Presidential Elections"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized that (12/22):

". To be fair, after Ma Ying-jeou became the KMT chairman, one of the expectations in the society was that Ma should abandon the [KMT's] confrontational position but carry out negotiation and cooperation between the ruling party and opposition parties based on the idea of 'Taiwan First' and the welfare of 23 million Taiwan people. The possibility of delivering the U.S. arms procurement bill to the Legislative Yuan's National Defense Committee for review is especially considered as an important indicator of Ma's political stance.

"In fact, we are almost completely certain that Ma will be the only candidate representing the pan-Blue alliance in the 2008 presidential elections. In other words, Ma is one of the few who could become Taiwan's president. Based on this [thinking], we urge Chairman Ma not to follow the KMT's ideology and block the bill from being delivered to the Legislative Yuan's National Defense Committee for review. The reason is that no matter who becomes the Taiwan president, he/she has to be responsible for the protection of all the [Taiwan] people. ."

3. "The Meaning of the Arms Bill"

The pro-independence "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized that (12/22):

"If, as [KMT Chairman] Ma Ying-jeou has often claimed, his party supports legitimate self-defense and is against only a 'sucker's' arms purchase, then wouldn't the legislative review provide a good opportunity for lawmakers from his party to engage in a rational debate with their pan-green counterparts? ."

". Regardless of whether or not this is the case, the pan-blues' ceaseless rejection of the bill in the Procedure Committee has drawn questions from the public and fueled concern in Washington that Taiwan may, after all, not be serious about its own defense.

"Without doubt, the ball is now in Ma's court. The legislative review will provide one and all with an opportunity to see whether Ma is sincere about Taiwan's defense. ."

4. "'Taiwan Passing': New Concerns Looming for U.S.-Taiwan Relations"

Lai I-chung, Director for International Affairs at the Taiwan Think Tank wrote in the pro-independence, limited circulated "Taiwan Daily" [circulation: 30,000] that (12/22):

". The major damage caused by the delayed passage of the

U.S. arms procurement bill on U.S.-Taiwan relations is that Taiwan has become an 'unreliable' partner in the eyes of the United States. . A more negative impact caused by the 'unreliability' is that Taiwan has become 'irrelevant' on U.S-Taiwan relations. It is not because the United States does not regard highly Taiwan, but that the United States cannot ascertain Taiwan's attitude due to Taiwan's paralyzed democracy. Moreover, the United States considers Taiwan to be an unmanageable factor when making strategic decisions, and Taiwan is therefore not included in those decisions. ."

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